



## Klamath Network Featured Creature

### July 2005

### Blue Grouse (*Dendragapus obscurus*)

#### FIELD NOTES:

##### General Description:

The blue grouse is a large, dark, blue to black ground-dwelling bird. Displaying males show a bare red or yellow fleshy patch on the neck. The red coloration is most common in interior populations, with the yellow coloration occurring in coastal populations. The taxonomy of the species remains disputed with some scientists recognizing only one species and others separating coastal and interior varieties.

##### Behavior:

This species is given to elaborate courtship displays with hooting, flutter-flights, head bobbing, biting of neck feathers, and sometimes even whinnying. Hearing the deep, resonant hooting of the male can be an eerie experience on a forest hike, to some evoking the call of the Sasquatch! Males have many sexual partners; female mating behavior is less well-known. Nests are usually outside male territories, perhaps to prevent additional sexual advances. Nests are formed by shallow depressions in the ground, often with thin linings of only dead vegetation.

##### Feeding

Food is comprised mainly of plants such as herb leaves and flowers, conifer needles, and shrub berries. Young consume largely arthropods their first summer of life, switching to vegetable matter in the first Fall. During winter, the diet of mature blue grouse consists chiefly of conifer needles.

##### Where to see it in the Klamath Parks:

The blue grouse is a common resident of high elevation conifer forest in the parks, with prominent populations along the Big Tree Trail in Oregon Caves NM, and the Bumpass Hell Trail in Lassen Volcanic NP.



##### Habitat:

Blue Grouse favor fairly open montane forest. Nesting and brood-rearing occur on open or early seral environments with movement into adjacent coniferous forests in the Fall and Winter.

##### Distribution:

The blue grouse occurs in forested mountains from southeast Alaska southward through the Pacific ranges to California and from the Rockies southward to Arizona and New Mexico. It is largely absent from low elevation areas without forest or with extensive urban development.

##### Status

In some areas, loss of habitat from urban development and farming has resulted in population extinctions. Generally population levels are in a slow rangewide decline, although the reasons are not known. Logging is considered to be a potential threat to this forest-associated species, but appears to have mixed effects. Logging can create early seral habitat that favors nesting and brood-rearing, but can also remove forest cover that is needed for winter habitat. Audubon recognizes the blue grouse as a watchlist species due to rangewide declines. Preservation or restoration of healthy montane forests will benefit this species in the Klamath Parks and region.